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## **Determinants of malnutrition amongst children: a case study of Malappuram in Kerala**

### **Abstract**

The nutritional status of children has considerable importance because of its beneficial effects on later years of life. Studies found that the poor nutritional status in early years of life can affect their rest of life by retarding academic performance, reducing productivity, receding economic achievement and failing the ability to contribute to society. The wide and long-lasting consequences of this problem made it one of the biggest developmental challenges. To tackle this challenge the first thing need to do is to understand the reasons for this problem. However, the reasons behind it are poorly understood and diverse across localities.

In order to find the major factors responsible for child malnutrition a cross sectional survey, using multi-stage cluster sampling, conducted and information regarding household socioeconomic factors and child anthropometry of 1400 children were collected from district Malappuram. A multi level regression model was estimated to determine the important determinants of child malnutrition. Weight-for-age index is used as a measure of malnutrition. Children whose weight-for-age is less than -2 standard deviation from the median of the WHO Child Growth Standard is considered as malnourished.

The study found alarming proportions of malnutrition amongst children in Malappuram. In the district, 40 % of children were stunted, 37 % were underweight and 23 % were wasted. The study found that individual, parental, household and community level factors are contributed to variation in nutritional status of children. Among the individual specific variables age, birth weight and birth interval have significant impact on child malnutrition. However, the study

found no significant gender differences in the nutritional status of children in district Malappuram. Among the parental specific factors mothers health status has significant effect on child nutrition. Weheras, education level of father and mother found to be insignificant in determining nutrition. Among the household level variables economic status, access to mass media and access to safe drinking water have a beneficial effects on nutritional status of children. It indicates the beneficial effects of a general improvement of living standard in the long run policies of reducing malnutrition.

Contrary to expectation the study found no significant rural urban differences in the nutritional status of children. Similarly, the distance to health facility, birth order of the child and household size do not appeared to be binding constraints on nutritional status of children. In the same manner no variables related to care like ante natal care and feeding practices were found to be significant in determining the nutritional status of children.

The results of the study imply that the causes of malnutrition range from individual to community factors. Therefore, policies aiming only on child may fail to bring desired results. The results of the study support a call for the widening of focus of nutrition policy and programmes from child and mother to earth and environment.

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